



Written testimony of Mary Moninger Elia, 1 Templeton Street, West Haven, CT, in support of

HB 5591, An Act Creating the Connecticut Retirement Security Program , and

SB 221, An Act concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave

Chairman Gomes, Chairman Tercyak and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

As Secretary of the Connecticut Alliance for Retired Americans, an organization representing more than 53,000 seniors in CT, I wish to testify in support of HB 5591 presently before the Labor Committee. Connecticut has the ability to be on the cutting edge of policy that deals with the issue of elderly poverty by creating a public pension system to support future aging residents. The CT Alliance has been in support of creating a public pension system since its inception several years ago. Connecticut has done the studies, it is clear that the need is there, and I urge you to take this next step and establish the system here in Connecticut. I realize it will not impact present retirees, however, it clearly is what government should do. That is, project forward, anticipate needs of tomorrow, and develop programs that will help citizens and our economy in the future.

We all remember the demise of traditional investment instruments during the collapse of the Wall Street and the financial industry in 2008. We all know, as well, of the many families that refinanced homes during skyrocketing home prices to send children to college or simply to continue a middle class lifestyle. Many are still buried in debt due to the housing slump, stock market crash and an uneven recovery of both. This economy has devastated many Connecticut families and made the retirement dream a myth. Had we developed this type of public retirement plan several decades ago, the present nightmare would have been softened for our seniors.

Short of working until their death, there will be a period in people's lives when adequate retirement income will be needed in order to be self-sufficient. Otherwise, they will become consumers of the public assistance which is an expensive, and probably unsustainable, solution. Yet many are fearful of saving and investing in an age when we hear about scams and unscrupulous schemes that have victimized unsuspecting people and cost them their life savings. Having a professionally managed, portable retirement fund available through the state government, I believe, would encourage more savings at all stages of life so people would be more prepared at retirement age.

It just makes sense to begin the process of protecting our most vulnerable citizens of the future by looking at the possibility of creating an affordable "Public Retirement Security System" to expand their retirement security, and keep them active in our communities and spending in our economy. Social

Security took several decades to impact the population it was intended to help, and this plan will take time to develop and mature as well. So let's begin now. It has little cost for the state to design and offer. Yet the benefits to our citizens could be huge.

The Connecticut Alliance Executive Board supports this bill and I urge you to pass it out of your committee and work for its passage by the General Assembly.

Additionally, the CT Alliance supports SB 221, An Act Creating Paid Family and Medical Leave because it is time to support families in caring for children, spouses, and parents in time of great need. As a senior organization, we are particularly concerned about not burdening our children. We do not want them to have to choose between a job and taking the time needed to assist us if a medical disaster strikes. Whichever way they choose, anguish and angst often follow. Smaller employers are more apt to allow employees time to deal with family crises because they know their individual employees. In larger companies, employees are anonymous numbers so they often are not handled with the same compassion. I believe, everyone should know they have the right to a reasonable paid family leave and I believe the way this is structured is reasonable.

My understanding is that this will have no cost to the state, that it would work pretty much like a "sick leave bank" that I was fortunate to be part of, though I never needed to use it, when teaching in West Haven. The paid family medical leave allows for the flexibility without fear of loss of employment or total loss of resources, and allows all workers to be able to be there for family member in need. As a senior citizen, I realize even more how important that is.

Please pass this bill out of your committee and work for its passage by the General Assembly.